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Surendra Arjun Shirsat

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CHAPTER 4

WAGES IN THE 18TH-CENTURY MARATHA REGION

Surendra Arjun Shirsat

4.1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

In pre-modern Indian society, work by wage labourers, whether called workers, labourers or servants, was basic for not only all economic sectors, particularly agriculture—by far the largest of all—but also industry, transport, trade and commerce, and any work performed and organized directly by the government. Despite the view in most historiography, 18th-century Maharashtra was in many ways a period of economic prosperity (Gordon, 1994, 2007; Perlin, 1984, pp. 96–107). If this revisionist view is correct, we may ask ourselves to what extent wage dependents occupied both by the government and private employers shared in that prosperity. In this chapter, I will attempt to answer this question on the basis of fresh material in the Marathi language available in the Pune archives (for an overview, see Divekar et al., 1989, p. 1, 3–6). The majority of my sources refer to income and expenditure of the government, but still a glimpse of privately paid wages will be visible. Records on wages and prices are also available for pre-18th century Maharashtra, but less sufficiently and therefore this exploratory chapter concentrates on the 18th century.

By 'Maratha region' is meant here the area that Chhatrapati Shivaji had established as an independent state in the 17th century as well as its extensions in the 18th century, situated in today's Maharashtra by his successors (Gordon, 1994; Sardesai, [1946]1986). In that age and up until its conquest by the East India Company, this was part of a still greater unit, the Maratha Empire (see Figure 4.1).

The Maratha region was administratively divided into *prants*, comparable to the *parganas* of the Mughal empire. As all *prants* shared a common political, economic and administrative system, one of them, for which good sources are available, has been selected for this case study, the area of Pune *prant* (see Figure 4.1). Even if details will undoubtedly vary, it is probable that the results will be found to be applicable to the entire Maratha region. However, at present, no comparative historical studies have been attempted at.

This chapter is based on documents from the Pune Archives, also known as the *Peshwa Daftar*. One section in particular, known as the *Prant Ajmas Daftar*, is useful for the study of the Maratha economy and related subjects. It includes the data pertaining to the Pune *prant*, which is used in this chapter. The documents are written in Marathi, noted down in the *Modi* script, a script that was used until almost the middle of the 19th century but is no longer in use. The language is Marathi.

In these financial documents, the formation on wage payments can be found among the expenses under the title *baddal mushahira* (बद्दल मुशाहिरा), which may be translated as salary. We also find other related words such as *rojmara* (रोजमरा), especially used for wages to unskilled labourers), and *vetan* which seems to have about the same significance, as well as *tainat* (military salary) and *aasami* (literally 'person[s]' but in this context persons to whom salaries have been paid; Chapekar, 1937, p. 16).

One way to determine the importance of the wage sector is to study the share of wage payments in total expenditure. All sources studied here demonstrate clearly that a major part of state expenditure was on wages. For example, direct expenditure on wages in the entire Maratha empire between 1763 and 1772 varied from 84 per cent to 91 per cent (Table 4.1).

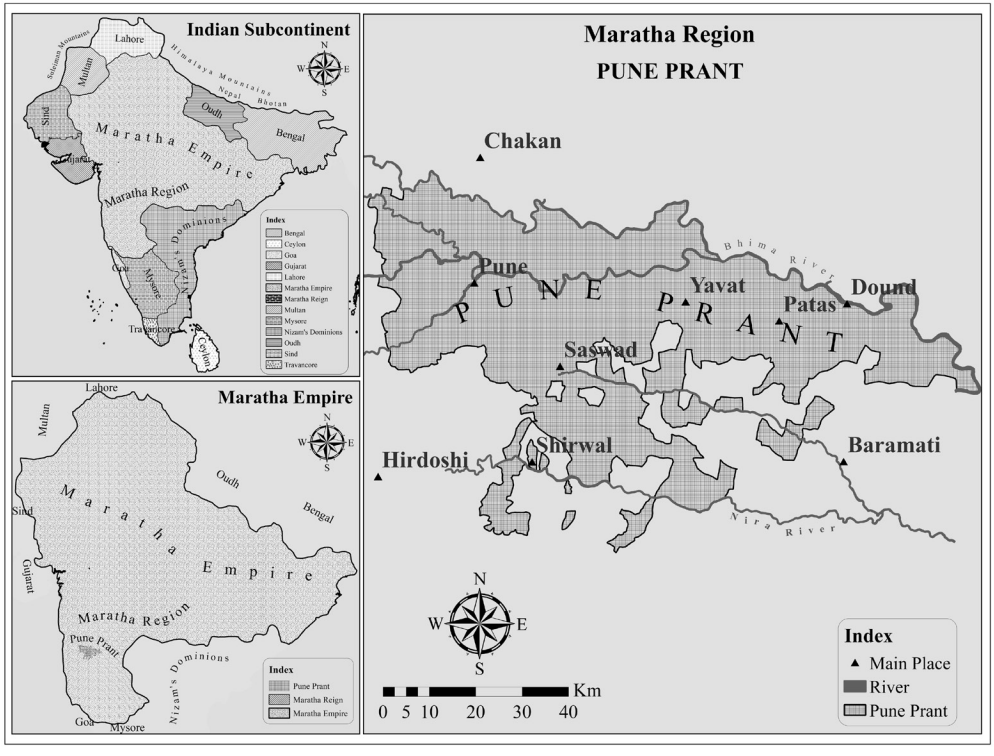

Figure 4.1 The Maratha Region in the 18th Century

Source: The author.

Table 4.1 Salary–Expenditure Proportion: Maratha Empire 1763 to 1772

Year	Expenditure: Salaries Amounts in Crores	Percentage %	Expenditure: Other than Salary Amount in Lakhs	Percentage %
1763	1.45	88	20	12
1764	1.70	84	30	16
1766	2.25	91	25	9
1767	2.00	87	25	13
1768	2.00	86	30	14
1769	1.80	86	27	14
1770	1.70	84	30	16
1772	2.75	91	40	9

Source: Chapekar (1937).

Table 4.2 Salary Expenditure Proportion in the Forts Near Pune Town

Year	Fort	Actual Expenditure	Expenditure on Salary	Percentage
1764–1765	*Sinhagad*	46,000	40,500	88.05
1770–1771	*Sinhagad*	53,041	46,351	87.38
1787–1788	*Sinhagad*	64,319	48,994	76.17
1766–1767	*Purandar*	29,650	26,416	89.09
1815–1816	*Purandar*	29,820	27,912	93.60

Source: Unpublished *Modi* script document, Pune Archives, *Prant Ajamas* Section, *Rumal* no. 08, 100, 130, 146.

At the lower levels, we see something similar, for example, in the period 1764–1765 to 1815–1816, between 76 per cent and 94 per cent of the total expenditure for the forts near Pune were paid as salaries (see Table 4.2).

A lower, but still impressive ratio (47%–63%) is found for the expenditure of the Pune *prant* (see Table 4.3) (Apate, n.d., p. 123). It is to be remembered that fort expenditure was only on salary, while

Table 4.3 Salary Expenditure Proportion in Pune *Prant*, from 1738–1739 to 1785–1786

S. No.	Region	Year	Total Expenditure in ₹	Salary Expenditure in ₹ Paid Directly for Baddal Mushahira and for the Forts	
1.	Pune *prant*[1]	1738–1739	78,808	37,324	47.36%
2.	Pune *prant*[2]	1742–1743	90,331	55,123	61.02%
3.	Pune *prant*[3]	1767–1768	132,789	66,173	49.53%
4.	Pune *prant*[4]	1772–1773	128,532	59,983	46.66%
5.	Pune *prant*[5]	1785–1786	136,120	85,092	62.51%

Source: Prant Ajmas, Rumal no. 1, 26, 27, 39, 427, 428, 429, 551.
Note: Besides, we know that in 1776–1777, the salary of hereditary officers was ₹68,655 and ₹62,484 in in 1802–1803.

prant expenditure is on everything including salary. However, as can be seen from the table, salary expenditure still remained high.

In view of the fact that wages were so important, at least in the government sector in this part of India and for this period, it is to be regretted that wages have never been studied before, so we have to start from scratch and will therefore take the following steps: in Section 4.2, we will report and discuss the different types of nominal wages found in the sources; in Section 4.3, we follow the modes of payment which will enable to receive an idea of wages actually received during one year by different groups of occupations; in Section 4.4, we will take the step from nominal to real wages and to standard of living by introducing prices of primary products in Maharashtra in order to summarize the main results and draw some conclusions.

4.2. SALARIES AND WAGES

We can divide the wage earners, found in these sources into three categories: (a) civil servants, (b) military, (c) privately paid servants and workers. They will be presented and briefly discussed in this order.

4.2.1. Civil Servants of the Central Government

Civil servants of the central government were paid salaries from high to low. Just to give two examples: Shrinivas Gangadhar, the *pratinidhi* or prime minister of the Maratha empire received ₹66,661 each year in the period 1763–1771, and Harirao Ramchandra, the *amatya* or minister of finance, received ₹2,436 rupees in the same period (Apate, n.d., p. 108). The revenue collectors of the *prants* were also well paid, for example, the *Kamavisdar* of Pune *prant* received ₹3,000 from 1737–1738 to 1742–1743, ₹4,000 in 1763–1764 and even ₹8,000 between 1783–1784 and 1804–1805.[6] The *subedar* or the head of a *suba* (the larger province which was subdivided into *prants*) received ₹1,500 in 1783–1784.[7] The subedar got a lower salary because he was a permanent official who got paid irrespective of how much revenue was collected. The *Kamavisdar* on the other hand was appointed for a specific period under a contract and was paid according to the revenue collected. Generally, 4 per cent of the income paid to the state was the *Kamavisdar*'s share. However, this also varied, so it could be either a fixed salary or a share of the revenue.

These sums are impressive, of course, but most likely they represent only part of the total remuneration and perks that such high-ranking civil servants received. On the other hand, they also had to maintain an extensive household. Although it is not difficult to cite more of such high salaries, I will concentrate hereafter on medium and low incomes as they tell us much more about the general welfare of the population (Tables 4.4 and 4.5).

As may be expected, salaries depended on the level of administration, as exemplified for the Civil and Revenue Department of Pune *prant* and its subdivisions or *tehsils*, called *Patas Taraf*.

The lowest administrative level of the Maratha empire was the sub-district, headed by a *deshmukh* (its hereditary chief), assisted by a *deshpande* and encompassing a number of towns and villages. The village offices included the *patil* (the hereditary village headman), the *kulkarni* (his clerk who received half the salary of the *patil*) and the *chougula* (his assistant). In the *kasba* or market towns, we find offices such as *shete* (the superintendent of the market, also responsible for just weights and measures)

Table 4.4 Salaries of Civil Servants and Military of the Central Government

Post in the Civil Administration	*Per Year (₹)*	*Per Month (₹)*
Fadnis (head clerk)	350	*30*
Potanis (head of treasury)	312	*29*
Sabnis (head of salary office)	300	*25*
Gumasta (agent)	200	*17*
Karkun (clerk)	75–100	*6–8*
Pyada (peon)	50	*4*
Tofevaril kasar (skilled artillery worker)	Not given	30
Swar (freelance horsemen)	Not given	15
Bargir (horsemen)	Not given	6
Saravan (camel rider/men)	Not given	3–4
Harkami (all sorts of jobs)	Not given	4
Pakhali (watermen)	Not given	3
Mottadar (housekeeper)	Not given	2–3

Note: Salaries in italics are our own reconstruction of monthly wages (rounded) where only annual wages are available.

and the *Mahajan* (superintendent of the traders). The wages of these hereditary authorities were mainly paid out in the form of usufruct of land but, in addition, there was also a certain sum of cash, called *Sadilwarpatti*, sometimes added by a portion from octroi and some articles given by villagers (Elphinstone, 1821, Appendix xxi).

For one local government, that of the capital of Pune, we know the salaries and wages of 56 civil servants, all paid out in cash (Table 4.6).

We may conclude that the income of the higher echelons consisted of different components. A common worker, however, like a peon or a water carrier in 18th-century Maharashtra, received only a wage in cash and could expect to receive on average a wage of ₹2 to ₹3 and at a maximum of ₹4 per month.

Table 4.5 Annual Salaries for Officials of Pune *Prant*

	Havaldar हवालदार	*Taraf Kamavisdar* तरफ कमाविसदार	*Mujumdar* मुजुमदार	*Daftardar* दफ्तरदर	*Lihinaar* लिहिणार	*PyadeLok* प्यादे लोक
	Head of Administration	*Revenue Collector*	*Office Superintendent*	*Documentation Officer*	*Writer*	*Peon*
	Prant level	*Tehsil Level*				
1737–1738[8]	120	—	72	48		24/30/35
1742–1743[9]	120	—	72	48		24/30/35
1763–1764	130	375		—	115	36
1783–1784	130	375	50	—	125	36
1794–1795	130	225	50	—	125	36
1804–1805	130	—	—	—	125	36

Source: Prant Ajamas Section, Rumal no. 1, 26, 27, 39, 427, 428, 429, 551.

Table 4.6 Salaries Paid by the Central *Kotawali* Office of *Kasba* Pune, 1767–1768

Post	Number	Wages per Person per Year (₹)	Total
Kotwal (commissioner of the city)	1	300	300
Vakil (advocate)	4	50	200
Daftardar (document keeper)	1	150	150
Gasti che lok (security guards)	4	125	500
Shibandi (sipahi, soldier) (for 11 months)	40	44	1760
Divatya (torchbearers) (for 11 months)	2	55	110
Harkami (unskilled helper)	2	50	100
Watandar Naikavadi (hereditary worker at the octroi post)	2	24	48
Watandar Dandiye (hereditary post at the octroi post)	2	24	48
Watandar Tansari (hereditary worker at the octroi post)	2	24	48
Total	56		3,264

Source: Prant Ajamas Section, Rumal no. 120.

4.2.2. Military

Above we have encountered already a number of military salaries (see Table 4.4). For a number of reasons, it is not easy to understand these military salaries precisely. First, military received an extra allowance for outstation military expeditions (Chapekar, 1937, p. 16). Second, senior officers had to spend part of their salaries to the payment of servants and goods (see Table 4.7, partially overlapping with Table 4.8).

Third, annual salaries were sometimes understood as pay during 11 or even 8 instead of 12 months. Fourth, salaries were sometimes paid out both in cash and in goods, especially textiles. Besides, sometimes the cash part of the salary of officers was

Table 4.7 Annual Salary of Naganath Narayan, *Killedar* (Commander) *Sinhagad* fort 1764–1765

₹	
1,000	For himself
110	2 assistants (*Porga*)[10] salary for 11 months (per person per month ₹5)
55	Torchbearers' salary for 11 months (per month ₹5)
66	Banner holder salary for 11 months (per month ₹5)
48	Brahman salary for 12 months (per month ₹4)
75	Cook salary for 12 months
135	Feed for horses
55	Guard salary for 12 months
100	Given cloths as a share of salary, 250 *aankh* (a measurement of cloth)
333.5	Food and religious expenses
22.5	Oil for lamp
2,000	₹ total

Source: Prant Ajamas Section, Rumal no. 8.

paid through *varat* (वरात) or promissory note dispatched by the government (Chapekar, 1937, p. 17). Payment was mentioned in cash but actually it was delivered as follows: one-third in cash, one-third in cloth and one-third in kind. For example, in the year 1750–1751, *Nilo Sondeo* was appointed as a *Sabnis* or head clerk at the *Sinhagad* fort. His salary was ₹600 per year in cash, cloth 100 *aankh*. His salary also included payment of *divatya* (torchbearers) and *pyada*, helpers, who were to be paid ₹4 per month, but the salary would be paid for eight months for a 12-month work period (Vad, 1906: I:2, p. 192).

Taking this all into account, we nevertheless receive a clear picture, especially for the lower ranks.

Ordinary wages were paid out in cash, kind or both, as per terms and conditions laid by government and previous traditions.

Table 4.8 Salaries for Sinhagad Fort 1764–1765

Post	Persons Appointed	Salary Type	Salary per Month	Salary (₹ per Year)
Killedar (contractor of revenues of the fort)	1(– 7)	Yearly	*167*	2,000
Hawaldar (head of fort administration)	1	Yearly	*50*	600
Sarnobat (treasurer at the fort)	1	Yearly	*16.5*	200
Subedar (head of the fort and the surrounding region)	1	Yearly	*37.5*	450
Sabnis (in charge of salary)	1	Yearly	*33*	400
Karakhanis (maintainer of the stock)	1	Yearly	*16.5*	200
Fadnis (documents in charge)	1	Yearly	*16.5*	200
Karkun (clerk)	1	Yearly	*10.5*	125
Lihinar (writer)	3	Yearly	*16.5*	200
Sardar (chieftains at fort)	15	Yearly	25	–
Bargir (soldiers)	535	Yearly	10	120
Porga (assistant or peon)	2	11 months	5	110
Divatya (torchbearers)	1	11 months	5	55
Abdagira (umbrella holder)	1	11 months	6	66
Brahman	1	Yearly	4	48
Mudpak/Achari (cook)	1	Yearly	*6*	75
Bhaledar/Choppdar (Guard)	1	Yearly	*4.5*	55
Pyada (Unskilled labourers)	80	Yearly	*2*	25
	648			

Source: Prant Ajamas Section, Rumal no. 8.
Note: In italics, our own reconstruction of monthly wages (rounded) where only annual wages are available.

The cash part was paid by the government through its salary office. Sometime, the soldiers were given a letter known as *Shetasanad* (शेतसनद) to collect their wages from the revenue income of certain villages. Sometimes the entire salary of a person was paid in kind. In year 1751–1752, two Portuguese men, *Manuel Rodrigues* and *Pascal Rujal* were appointed as *golandaz* (artillery men) at Purandar Fort. They were paid in kind: half a *maund* and one and a half *pyali* of rice,[11] 1 *pyali* pulses and a quarter *pyali* salt per month (Mahajan, 1980, p. 206). It means they got 106 kg rice, 4 kg pulses and 1 kg salt per month per head.

In addition, the higher ranks in the army, like the higher ranking civil servants, were compensated in a very diversified way. That was not the case for the lower ranks. Apart from the various modalities of wage payments, we learn from these military wage payments not only that minimum male wages in 18th-century Maharashtra were only ₹2 per month or 8 annas per week but also what the purchasing power (expressed in primary food articles) of the better paid artillery men was.

4.2.3. Private Wage Payments

Although the far majority found in the sources pertain to government officials, civil or military, we luckily do have some data on wages paid out privately that will be summarized in the following. They pertain to workers involved with the religious centres and temples, funded by government and private servants. The *Brahman* and the *Puranik* (the first for the rituals, the second specialized in the holy scriptures and their explanation), as well as the music player, the watchman, the peon, the waterman, the *gurav* (a priest for local deities), etc., were private servants of *Peshwa* family and other *sardars* (knights). We find their wages in the private papers of the upper class families, occasionally preserved among state papers in the state archives.

The diversity is enormous. At the top in one source (the 'Satara Rajas' and the Peshwa's diaries' for the 18th century), we find a cook, paid ₹1 a day (per month this would be ₹30!), apparently a top-class chef. His best assistant got half that wage, but the meanest among them only 1 anna per day or ₹2 per month. Brahmins who conducted religious ceremonies got 4 annas per day, or a fair ₹7 per month (Vad,

1908, p. 88). Cleaners received 3.75 *tankas or takas* (Vad, 1908, pp. 82–83). The wages of six *pies* for grinding one *pyali* (near about 4 kg) of corn, supposing that this work took one full day (Vad, 1908, p. 279).

In a second source (the 'Tulshibagwale Daftars')[12] of the second half of the 18th century, we see a variation among skilled labourers, with stone workers receiving between ₹4:10 (₹4 and 10 *annas*), carpenters receiving 3:8 and *ghisadi* (blacksmith) receiving 5:9 (in 1772–1773—Tulshibagwale Daftar) and ₹12:2 for 2 months of work, and among unskilled labourers (free labour and forced labour, *vethbegar*)[13] between ₹2 and ₹7:2 per 2 months of work (Athawale, 1976, pp. 119–120).

A third set of documents, many published, such as the Peshwa's diaries from the first half of the 18th century, shows a similar variety among the remuneration of male occupations, but is especially valuable because it mentions also female labourers (Table 4.9).

For the interpretation of these different denominations, we have to take into account that in this part of India and in this period generally ₹1 equals 16 annas or 24 takas or 48 paise or 144 rukas (differently said 3 rukas = 1 paisa; 2 paise = 1 taka; 3 paise = 1 anna, and 48 paise = ₹1) (Maheshwari & Wiggins, 1989, pp. 14–15). The variety here is even bigger than among the civil servants and the military that we have encountered before. Nevertheless, summing up then all different data from these three sets of sources for privately paid wages, we find female labourers at the lowest level who hardly could make ₹1 per month, virtually the same as unskilled labourers at ₹1 per month according to the *Tulshibagwale Daftars*.

Table 4.9 Privately Paid Wages in the Pune *Prant* in the First Half of the 18th Century

	Daily Wages	***Monthly Wages***
Female labourers	0.5 annas or 6 rukas	15 annas
Skilled worker	3 annas	₹5–10
Peon	2 anna and 5 rukas	₹4
Clerk	4 annas and 3 rukas	₹8

Source: Mahajan (1980, p. 206).

Elsewhere, the lowest grade of kitchen assistants earned ₹2 per month. A kind of middle category contains a peon at ₹4, cleaners at ₹4 and 3 annas (112.5 takas per month = ₹4 and 16 takas), but possibly also persons grinding grain (6 paise per day would mean ₹3 and 8 annas per month if our supposition of a workload of 7 kg per day is correct). The next category encompasses Brahmins at ₹7 and clerks at ₹8 as well as most other skilled workers.

4.3. MODES OF PAYMENT

We have already seen glimpses of the different modes of payment, which we have to consider here more in detail before we can take the step to express these nominal wages into real terms in the next paragraph. The following aspects will pass in review: (a) payment in kind or cash, (b) kinds of coins used in cash payments, (c) time units used for calculating wages and (d) frequency of payment.

4.3.1. Payment in Kind or Cash

Payments in kind, as we have seen, can be found not only at the top of the income pyramid but also at the bottom. At the top, we have seen already several examples, in particular the payment of part of the salary in the form of usufruct of land. In the same category falls the exemption of taxation as part of the remuneration. No tax was imposed on the houses of government salaried and skilled workers. In Pune city, *Sadashiv Sheth Kasar* was a skilled worker who received remission of house tax (Vad, 1911: II:7, p. 388). When a government servant ordered some food grains from some other part of the state, he could do so without paying octroi. This concession was taken advantage of by many of the officers of Pune, who brought rice from the Konkan region into Pune without paying octroi (Vad, 1911, p. 211). This facility was available for only the permanent workers and service holders; non-permanent workers were not entitled to this concession.

At the bottom of the pyramid, the remuneration of unskilled labourers and artisans was sometimes also given in kind (अडशेरी, *adsheri*) for occasional work, mostly for a few days, never as a regular government servant. Such payments in kind mostly consisted of four items: grain, pulses, red chili and tobacco. For example, one

day's work in 1811 and 1812 was paid 1 *ser* (1 kg) of *bajra* (pearl millet), 1½ *ser* (1.5 kg) of *tur dal* (a particular type of lentil) and 1 *ser* (1 kg) of red chili and tobacco together.[14] The total value of these goods was not more than 1.5 or 2 *annas*, which if paid out in cash would result in a monthly salary of some ₹2.4–₹2.8. Payments in kind were also paid to a non-salaried hereditary class of non-skilled labourers, known as *Vethabigar*, who were just entitled to food or food grains. In 1793, government utilized 83 labourers to transport some load and gave food grains to each of them, worth ₹13:12, which works out to a cost of ₹2:65 per head (Athawale, 1976).

4.3.2. Kinds of Coins Used in Cash Payments

We saw already before that in theory the monetary system may look a bit complicated, but that as such the relation between the different monetary units was clear: ₹1 equals 16 annas or 24 takas or 48 paise or 144 rukas. However, in the sources, we encounter a bewildering variety of names of currencies: *Shahusikka*, *Malakapuri*, *Malharshahii*, *Fulacheri*, *Panchmela*, *chikodi*, *Chatarasingi* rupees, Gwalior *ganjikot* rupees, *Saroli*, *trishuli*, *bawadi*, *Gajapuri*, *Aurangabadi*, *Laturi*, *Aajameri*, *Ahmadabadi*, *Belapuri* and *Badodi Aurangabadi*, *Ahmadabadi, shetashahi, delhi-sikka* silver coins and *hon* and *Putali* gold coins. Besides, there were—very important for wage earners—copper coins by way of small change (खुर्दा *khurda*): ruka, paise and taka. In reality, however, ₹1 (the *ankushi*) was universally used as the money of account, and not all coins were used for the same types of payments, and that certainly goes for wage payments (Divekar et al., 1989, p. 7). Problems could arise, however, from the fact that the ratios between gold, silver and copper fluctuated. Thus, the ratio of 48 paise per rupee may be taken as an average, but in specific years this could fluctuate. The government tried to remedy this problem to a certain extent by publishing in its general market price lists, known as the *Nirakh* (निरख), including the the official rate of copper piece per silver rupee. In the *Nirakh* of year 1806–1807 of Pune *kasba*/market, ₹1 equalled 4 *taka* and 5 *rukas*. This is apparently a reflection of the fluctuating market price in that year, but it cannot be taken as a standard.

Workers preferred to be paid in coins they could use immediately in the marketplace for buying food and other necessaries.

Table 4.10 Group-wise Payment of 13 Horsemen in 1789

₹: annas	Specification and Interpretation
162:0	*Malakapuri* ₹ (162 silver ₹, or more pieces if including fractions of ₹)
70:0	*Malharshahi, Fulacheri* and *Panchmel* ₹ (70 silver ₹, or more pieces if including fractions of ₹)
90:9	19 *Honas* (Gold coins)
22:0	1 *Mohor* (Gold coins)
344:9	

Source: Prant Ajamas Section, Rumal no. 426.

Therefore, they tried to avoid as much as possible the money changers for the exchange of silver rupees into copper coins. However, especially when wages were paid out group wise, this was impossible as a telling example from 1789 demonstrates. In that case, 13 horsemen as a group received ₹344 and 9 annas, which sum was specified in detail (see Table 4.10). The division into 13 equal parts of ₹26.5 per person unavoidably must have involved the help of money changers at a cost obviously.

4.3.3. Time Units Used for Calculating Wages

Most wage earners, and especially the better paid ones, received their money for the time (mostly units of one month) that they actually worked. Thus, 12 months payment for 12 month's work, 10 months' salary for 10 months of work, etc. In other cases, however, payment was noted down per year or per month, but not given for all 12 months of the year. Based on a study of the documents, it can be stated that there were four types or methods (*shirasta*/शिरस्ता) to pay the wages: 8 months' salary (*aathmahi*/आठमाही), 10 months' salary (*dasmahi*/दसमाही), 11 months' payment (*akramahi*/अकरमाही) and the normal 12 months' salary (*barmahi*/बारमाही). One document in which it is stated that workers were given a salary of 11 months against work of 12 months dates from 1801.[15] Then a *bargir* (horseman), named *Ramji Kod*, received ₹65, in which sum was calculated at ₹6 per month for 11 months, totalling ₹66, from which ₹1 was deducted for *karkunee* tax (the tax for calculation of salary); therefore, he got ₹65.[16]

4.3.4. Frequency of Payment

The frequency of wage payments for the higher governmental ranks (*shaahii shirasta*/शाही शिरस्ता) and military commanders or knight (*sardars*) was different from that for the lower ones. The higher rank officers received their salaries only once per year, whereas the lower ranks received it per month.[17] Sometimes, the frequency of payment was even lower when, especially for the higher authorities, only part of the annual salary was paid. The other part was deposited in the government treasury and received only after 2 or 4 years of continuous service or honourable resignation from office.[18]

Another exception to the rule of regular payment was advance payments, both in cash or in kind. For weddings or any other ceremonies in the family of an employee, the government gave an advance in kind known as *Patravali*, which was in the form of a lunch plate. Probably because of the risks involved, advances were also allowed to spies, for example, when in 1812 a detective was sent to the *Konkan* area during the campaign of the *Peshwa*, he received an advance of no less than two months (₹8), plus ₹1 extra for inflation, so in total ₹9.[19]

Most ordinary workers were, however, paid by the day if daily wage earners, and per month if engaged permanently. Some, however, got their *rojmara* per one-and-half month, by dividing 12 months into 8 parts, each of one and half months (Chapekar, 1937, p. 15). Sometimes even the salary was distributed after two months and, in this way, six shares of the 12 months were distributed (Chapekar, 1937).

There were also fixed customs for the dates and days of salary distribution at the *Chavadi* (चावडी) or salary office in the village or town or on the fort. In the latter case, it was distributed on the day of full moon *(Chandraat*). There existed also a preference, undoubtedly, also among the workers themselves to be paid on festival days such as *Deepawali*, *Akshay Tritiya* and *Nagpanchami* (festival of snakes; Chapekar, 1937, p. 15). According to the records of the *Tulshibagwale* family, in 1773, ₹700 was distributed as a *Deepawali* share of wage payment. In 1792, ₹700 was distributed as a second share of wage payment on the fort *Purandar* (Chapekar, 1937, p. 55).[20] In 1779, ₹500 was paid as a wage payment on the occasion of *Nagpanchami* (Chapekar, 1937, p. 56).

4.4. FROM NOMINAL TO REAL WAGES AND TO A STANDARD OF LIVING

Occasionally we have already encountered information on consumption and real wages (at the end of Section 4.2.2 and in Section 4.3.1), but here we will try to discuss it in a more systematic way, especially for the lowest income groups as these are most numerous and therefore, to a great extent, general welfare levels. However, it will be impossible to address the latter here fully as we have not studied the income of the farmers and peasants by large the most numerous occupational groups.[21]

Keeping this in mind, it is important to stress that we have not found firm indications of rising or diminishing wage levels (see Table 4.5). The purchasing power of the wages therefore will have depended mostly on the price level of bread grains (see Table 4.11 and Figure 4.2).

Table 4.11 Prices of Food Grains, Pune 1760–1765 to 1816–1820

	Kg of Millet per ₹	
Year	*Jowar*	*Bajra*
1760–1765	26.57	21.26
1766–1770	19.80	21.14
1771–1775	24.07	19.04
1776–1780	22.62	21.83
1781–1785	29.26	27.68
1786–1790	25.30	22.30
1791–1795	17.62	14.89
1796–1800	16.48	14.90
1801–1805	21.04	14.84
1806–1810	19.59	18.31
1811–1815	20.87	17.91
1816–1820	23.72	18.56

Source: Divekar (2000, p. 554).

Figure 4.2 Movement of Prices of Millet (Kg per ₹), Pune 1760–1765 to 1816–1820

Source: The author.

These are only available from 1761 onwards. They show especially a deterioration (i.e., less kg of both jowar and bajra after the most favourable quinquennial average of 1781–1785 which must have hit the wage earners very hard and lasted until the end of the century, after which a slow recovery took place, only to reach again the early 1780s level in the 1820s).

In order to understand what this meant to those with the lowest wages (as we saw males earning ₹2 per month and females half of that), we have two sources of information. T. T. Mahajan, in his unpublished thesis on Maratha economy and commerce, calculated that in the 18th century, one meal composed of rice, butter, ghee, *chapatis*, vegetables and a sweet dish, etc., for a family of 5 members costing 7 annas or ₹13.2 per month. From all the wage data, we have seen it is clear that hardly any wage worker could afford such a diet.

If we come to the food habits of ordinary people, the meal consisted of *bajra*, *jowar*, wheat and rice. For this meal, one family of 5 persons needs only 30–32 annas or at most ₹2. As we have seen, such an utterly simple and therefore deficient diet was in the reach of nearly all wage earners, but then we forget that a human being also needs clothing and shelter.

This becomes clear when we look at the maintenance costs of slaves. In the 18th-century Maratha state, we encounter some slaves,

especially at the forts (note that the death of a slave was recorded as a financial loss of the property of the fort). These slaves of course were not paid wages, but only received food, shelter and clothing. Once a year, female slaves got two new *saris*, two blouses and one blanket per year. Male slaves got three types of cotton clothes, a blanket and a leather slipper. Their food consisted of grains, pulses, salt, oil, ghee and jaggery. The total value of all these goods and food (known in the documents as *Ajamaas*/अजमास) was calculated in 1811–1812[22] about ₹15–18 per year (0.7 to 0.8 annas per day).

Taking into account that the fort authorities most likely could purchase these goods at a lower price than at the market because of their position and because they ordered them in bulk, in the second half of the 18th century to which most of our data pertain, a wage earner without a family and without costs of shelter and other necessaries would therefore need to earn at least more than one-and-a-half rupee per month. ₹2 seem to be a safe estimate for the minimum needs of an adult. For a family, more was needed, and this is possibly reflected in the wages in kind that we discussed before (at the end of Section 4.2.1), which converted into money boiled down to a monthly wage of ₹2.8–3.8.

Feeding a family at ₹2 was therefore out of the question and the labouring poor could only survive on the condition that their spouses also worked for wages. The earnings of a couple taken together, and possibly increased by some earnings of children, might have been just enough to survive in normal times, but not in case of any mishaps, and especially the end of the 18th century and the turn of the century must have been tough. Unfortunately, without further research, it is impossible to say anything about real wages before the mid-18th century.

4.5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This is a first, and therefore limited, attempt to come up with wage data for Maharashtra in the 18th century. Following pioneers like Divekar et al. (1989) who did so for commodity prices in the Pune market from 1761 onwards, but unavoidably in a much more restricted way, we have culled available archival documents and a handful of unpublished PhD theses from Pune University to come up with a first, admittedly impressionistic picture.

It is important to stress that the archival sources from the Peshwa archives, used here, are extremely rich and at the same time utterly neglected so far because, unfortunately, most historians depend nearly solely on English language sources when writing about Indian history of the 18th and 19th centuries.

The main result of this first inventory of wage data is threefold. First, wages and also wages paid out in cash were important in this period. Many depended on them. Second, the wages levels at the bottom of the income pyramid, the majority of the wage earners, make us feel rather sad because at least from 1761 onwards (earlier on no price data have been made available so far), they seem to have been just at the bare minimum to survive. From the early 1780s, they even deteriorated until the early 19th century. This brings us to the third conclusion that the recent revisionist optimistic view of the 18th-century Maharashtrian economy finds no confirmation in this study of real wages. Yes, Maharashtra witnessed a well-developed market economy based on cash payments but, awaiting further research, it is highly questionable whether the majority of the waged population profited from it.

GLOSSARY[23]

1. *Aasami* आसामी: Person or persons
2. *Adasheri* अडशेरी: Grain given as wage for his subsistence
3. *Ajamas* अजमास: Estimate, computation, rough calculation and conjecture
4. *Baddal mushahira* बद्दल मुशाहिरा: It's a title for salary in statement of expenditure of government
5. *Barakhandaj* बरखंदाज: A musketeer or a matchlock-man
6. *Chougula* चौगुला: An officer of village to help the *patil* or village headman
7. *Golandaj* गोलंदाज: A gunner or a bombardier
8. *Kamavisadar* कमाविसदार: The head collector of revenue
9. *Mahajan* महाजन: A hereditary officer in a village, *kasba* or city. His business is to superintend the trade of, and to assist in collecting the tax form, certain classes of traders.
10. *Prant* प्रांत: Subdivision of a country, a district, county or a shire

11. *Puranik* पुराणिक: (a) A Brahman well read in the *Puranas*; (b) a public expounder of them
12. *Rojmara* रोजमरा: Wages, hire and pay
13. *Sabnis* सबनिस: Head clerk attached to one of the officers. His business was to pay the soldiers and public servants of a district or charge.
14. *Sadilwarpatti* सादिलवारपट्टी: Any contingent charge paid by an extra assessment, also such extra assessment
15. *Sarnobat* सरनौबत: Master of the force on any place, especially on the fort
16. *Shahi-shirasta* शाही-शिरस्ता: Royal method of payment or salary for higher ranks
17. *Shete* शेट्ये: An officer in mart or commercial town. He has superintendence and regulation of the weight and measures and of the traffic, perfect of the market.
18. *Swarajya* स्वराज्य: Reign conquered by Chhatrapati Shivaji and formed a native state was called Swarajya
19. *Tainat* तैनात: (a) Military charge or command; (b) stipend or salary and (c) charge, trust, custody; care of keeping of; management or direction; control or authority over (things, business, person)
20. *Varat* वरात: An assignment or order upon the revenues or treasury
21. *Vetan* वेतन: Salary
22. *Vethabigar* वेठबिगार: A comprehensive or careless term for labour or service exacted without remuneration.

NOTES

1. *Prant Ajmas, Rumal* no. 26.
2. *Prant Ajmas, Rumal* no. 26.
3. *Prant Ajmas, Rumal* no. 26.
4. *Prant Ajmas, Rumal* no. 1.
5. *Prant Ajmas, Rumal* no. 1.
6. Pune Archives, *Rumal* no. 26.
7. Pune Archives, *Rumal* no. 26.
8. *Prant Ajmas, Rumal* no. 26.
9. *Prant Ajmas, Rumal* no. 26.

10. Today, the word *porga* is used to mean 'boy' or 'helper', as a slang word.
11. One *Pyali* is approximately 4 kg.
12. The Tulshibagwale were a family of bankers who were closely associated with the Peshwas from the second half of the 18th century.
13. This was a form of forced labour that was widely practised. Members of the lower caste were required to do whatever work was given to them by the upper castes or by the local officials, without payment, except for cooked food or food grains for the period of the work.
14. *Prant Ajmas*, *Rumal* no. 113, Fort Purandar.
15. *Prant Ajmas*, *Rumal* no. 113, Fort Purandar, p. 15.
16. *Prant Ajmas*, *Rumal* no. 113, Fort Purandar, p. 53. Anyone who got a salary had ₹1 deducted from the salary because they were paid a salary. In some ways comparable to the modern professional tax.
17. *Prant Ajmas*, *Rumal* no. 113, Fort Purandar, p. 15.
18. *Prant Ajmas*, *Rumal* no. 26 and 113.
19. *Prant Ajmas*, *Rumal* no. 26 and 113, p. 264.
20. *Prant Ajmas*, *Rumal* no. 26 and 113, p. 55.
21. See the contribution by Jan Lucassen to this volume.
22. *Prant Ajmas*, *Rumal* no. 113.
23. All definitions from Molesworth's *Marathi-English Dictionary*, corrected ninth reprint, Shubada-Saraswat Prakashan, Pune.
24. These are a series of 12 volumes published at the beginning of the 20th century, which contain excerpts from the Modi documents.

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